

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

NEW YORK CITY: Five years ago, Douglas and Jonathan Rand had an idea they thought could revolutionize play publishing. The twentysomething brothers founded a company in New York called **Playscripts, Inc.** based on three simple concepts: 1) Make excerpts available to potential buyers, rather than vague synopses; 2) keep print runs small to give exposure to a greater number of plays; and 3) utilize the potential of the Internet, which had gone untapped by a tradition-bound industry long dominated by **Samuel French** and **Dramatists Play Service**.

The first hurdle was to win over writers leery of putting their words online, says Douglas Rand. An early vote of confidence from Jonathan's fellow University of Pennsylvania alumnus, **Harold Prince**, got the ball rolling, as did some data encryption savvy: While as much as 90 percent of a given script may be perused on screen, the samples can't be printed.

The company's catalog, found at www.playscripts.com, is now a database more than 550 titles strong—searchable by title and author, length, genre, cast size, even commissioning organization. Douglas Rand says the site's online excerpts have been viewed 679,000 times and counting, and the company has licensed productions to schools and professional and amateur companies in 53 different countries.

Though the Rands are determined to keep the door open for unknown writers, Playscripts also cultivates relationships with agents and with organizations such as **New Dramatists** and the **National New Play Network**. There's cachet aplenty in its list of nearly 300 authors, which includes, among others, some well-known Davids (**Henry Hwang**, **Lindsay-Abair** and **Ives**) and four of the six playwrights showcased at last year's **Humana Festival of New American Plays**. (Playscripts is also the publisher for a new, high-profile *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation; see "Hit the Road, Jane" on page 12.)

Both playwrights themselves, the brothers are sensitive to what writers want: for example, to log onto a page that tracks purchases and productions of their work ("playwrights know everything as soon as we do," says Doug Rand), and to receive monthly royalty checks, rather than the six-month industry standard, if there are substantial earnings.

"We want to start treating playwrights like this is their livelihood," Rand explains. —*Nicole Estvanik*



Douglas, left, and Jonathan Rand, founders of Playscripts, Inc.

DANIEL PRINCUS